

545
4

1

CROESUS *and* IONE

A Drama in Four Acts

By

CHARLOTTE ELIZABETH WELLS

THE LIBRARY
OF THE AMERICAN
THEATRE

RIGGS PRINTING & PUBLISHING CO.
1123 BROADWAY, NEW YORK



YEARBOOK UNIT

PG3545
E534C7
1902

* CROESUS AND IONE

BY

CHARLOTTE ELIZABETH WELLS

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

CROESUS, King of Lydia.

CYRUS, King of Persia.

ISMENIDES, a young noble of
Ephesus.

GLYCON and DORUS, friends of

Ismenides.

THE QUEEN OF LYDIA.

IONE, a beautiful maiden of
Ephesus.

GENERALS AND CAPTAINS OF THE LYDIAN ARMY.

WOMEN ATTENDING ON THE QUEEN.

(IONE, pronounced I'ONE.)

ACT I.

Before the temple of Diana at Ephesus. Sunset. People of all classes stand idly about, as if after a festival. A few straggling worshippers enter or leave the temple. Children selling flowers linger near the steps in the hope of a chance customer. An old man of imposing mien who has the appearance of a philosopher, watches the people as they come and go, with an air of abstraction. A young woman with a child in her arms, stands near the old man, who occasionally speaks to her in a pitying tone. GLYCON and DORUS, two young Ephesian aristocrats, descend the temple steps together.

GLYCON (*yawning*)

“The city falls asleep, and so do we.”

DORUS

“Ay, 'tis most welcome now, this quietude;
When monarchs rule the day one keeps awake
But even the sun may shine to weariness.”

GLYCON

“Yet we are richer than when Croesus came.”

* Copyright, 1902, by CHARLOTTE ELIZABETH WELLS. (All rights reserved.)

NOTICE.—British copyright for this play has been secured.

DORUS

“ Though poorer for the Lady Ione.

GLYCON

“ You bring me news. I had not heard of this.”

DORUS

“ Why, since the King came here to make his gifts
The maiden is not seen in Ephesus.”

GLYCON

“ Not seen! why not? this is a mystery.”

DORUS

“ ’Tis not that we are blind, but she’s away.
The rumor says some Lord in Croesus’ train
Hath wooed her, or perchance hath stolen her.
The malcontents, ’tis true, suspect the King
Whose taste in beauty is most exquisite.
She was the leader of the noble maids
Who, dressed as Dian’s nymphs, attended him
In gay procession to the temple here.”

GLYCON

“ Ye gods! and we were free in Ephesus,
And now our noblest are this tyrant’s slaves.”

DORUS

“ ’Tis said Ismenides hath grown in strength
For very anguish since she disappeared.”

GLYCON

“ It works so sometimes; let us go to him.
Friends are like irritants that soothe the pain
With smarting touches on the wound they heal.”

(*Exit GLYCON and DORUS.*)

OLD MAN

“ I heard their words and I am like to weep
For that sweet lady who hath gone away.”

YOUNG WOMAN (*carrying child in her arms—her face tear-stained,
her dress ragged and dirty.*)

“ And I’ve done naught but weep for days and days.
I loved her, for when all abandoned me
She threw a robe of mercy o’er my shame.”

FLOWER GIRL

“ Alas for Ione! she bought our flowers
And loved to play that she was one of us.
As frolicsome as any peasant-maid
She was, and yet we reverenced her.”

SECOND FLOWER GIRL

“ Never shall I forget the day she took
My wares away from me, and veiling her
As if some Eastern maid had wandered here,
She cried, ‘ Sweet flowers! Lords and ladies, will you buy?’
And by her witchery of voice and wit
Sold every bunch for thrice its worth and laughed
For joy at her own cleverness; then threw
The money in my lap, and bade me go
Get comforts for the little ones at home.
Ah! how the young lords followed her that day
And how she mocked them that they knew her not,

But thought her one of us, yet did not dare
So much as touch her hand she ruled them so."

FIRST FLOWER GIRL

"Methought the young Lord Ceyx suspicioned her
When in his eyes I saw the look they wear
For none but Lady Ione. Alas!
This disappearance sure will drive him mad."

SECOND FLOWER GIRL

"And yet she broke no troth in leaving him,
Having but laughter ever for his vows;
He was too slavish in his love for her.
I fear me it is Croesus has her now;
Proud maids like her love high, or not at all."

OLD MAN

"Hush! hush! her brother comes to pray for her.
Ah, poor Ismenides! thy step is slow."
(ISMENIDES approaches, supported by an attendant, and
enters the temple.)

OLD MAN

"Has Croesus won the gods, or will they hear?"

ACT II.

SCENE I.

In the royal palace at Sardis. An apartment opening to the east. Rich hangings have been drawn away, disclosing an airy balcony overhanging a garden. The time is a moment before sunrise. When the curtain rises IONE is seen with her back half turned to the audience; one arm is holding aside the massive drapery which by the gorgeousness of its color throws her white-robed figure into strong relief. A glow of rosy light appears in the east, and the maiden falls upon her knees—her upturned face and golden hair catch the first rays of the rising sun, and she is as one transfigured. Near her a group of slave-girls watch her every movement with wondering admiration. At the far end of the long apartment an Ethiopian stands on guard.

IONE

"How pure the dawn is! ever a new birth,
Touched by no thought of that sweet yesterday
That fled soft-footed to forgetfulness.
And this young morn that rises maidly
May bear within her breast great thoughts, great loves,
Ay, greater sorrows, sterner tragedies.
Morn, I salute thee! bring to Ione
I pray thee, none but pleasant things, for she
Is young yet like as thou art, and her feet
Are very restless, longing for the dance,
The swaying music, and the minstrelsy."

(She springs to her feet, and motioning to the maidens to join her, begins a rhythmic movement, but pauses after a few measures and throws herself down, sighing wearily.)

IONE

“Ah me! I am too frail to bear my heart
 So laden is it with a weight of love.
 My King! My King! 'tis such a little while
 Since no young maid in Greece could dance as I,
 And now though love is sweet, I am not gay.
 The spirit of the morning veils her face
 And will not smile upon me, or perchance
 Doth shroud in mystery her tenderness;
 I will make votive offerings unto joy
 And build a temple for her in my soul
 That she must dwell in for pure courtesy,
 Since all my youth is dedicate to her.
 Oh Joy! sweet goddess; daughter of the morn
 Thou visitest this earth so fitfully
 That we would doubt thy love, and our poor hearts
 Would break for longing, if thy lightest touch
 Were not so tender, and thine eyes so sweet
 That rapture grows immortal; born in us
 And passing from us to Eternity.
 Ah, thus is love made holy as a prayer.”

GUARD (*saluting*)

“Madam—the King!”

(*As CROESUS enters, IONE retains her kneeling posture, but turns and greets him with outstretched arms. Her eyes are full of tears, and she sighs involuntarily.*)

CROESUS (*bending over her, and lifting her*)

“What! tears, my Ione? Is not thy bondage sweet?”

IONE

“Alas, my lord! its sweetness wearies me,
 And all my womanhood lies in a swoon
 Without my heart's door, breathing heavily,
 As slaves breathe, sleeping. I, my lord, was free
 And would have braved some hardness merrily
 Some roughness of the march or battlefield.
 An Eastern houri would be happy here
 And so am I; it is a paradise
 That leaving, one might wander desolate
 And find not such another 'neath the sun.
 Yet am I yearning for a rocky glade
 With camp-fires all alight, while flashing swords
 Gleam out against the forest tapestry.
 I am of Dian's race, and love not ease.”

CROESUS (*smiling dreamily*)

“I care not if the way be rough or smooth
 So we two walk together for awhile
 Until the stars that mark our destinies
 Sink low toward that horizon whose far edge
 Looks over into lands we know not of.”

IONE

“And then, my lord! what then?”

CROESUS (*gayly*)

“ Then, if our streams of being must diverge,
 I’d leave thee in some vale of dreaming love
 Where thy most tender soul should solace find.
 While I? Ye gods! Give me the eternal winds
 That blow the stars before them like to leaves.
 Thus would I sweep before me men, yea, worlds.
 So strong within me is this spirit fire
 That scorning earth claims kinship with the sun.
 And thou? Ah, tremble not! no cruel gale
 Shall ruffle thy sweet petals, oh, my rose!
 Nay then, thou’rt cold! come close, I’ll shelter thee.”

IONE (*shivering*)

“ Even as thou did’st speak, a strange cold breath
 Came swiftly from the east and chilled my heart.
 Always it is the east to which I turn, and yet
 Some presence warns me that my death lies there.”

CROESUS (*merrily*)

“ Nay, foolish one! but gardens sweet with flowers
 And jewels that have decked great Cyrus’ queens—
 For we shall conquer him, and thou shalt sit
 Most royally, while royal maidens wait
 To serve thee on their knees. Thou art the prize
 Of none but Croesus, and not death himself
 Shall take his treasure from the king of kings.”

(*The KING attempts to embrace her, but IONE draws herself to her full height, and returns his glance with one of hurt defiance.*)

IONE

“ Croesus! my soul intoxicate with love
 Was even now within that dreaming vale
 Thou tellest of, and thought that it was Heaven;
 Yet would I have thee know, my lord, tho’ I
 Do gladly bear this shame and banishment
 ’Tis as the sharer of a warrior’s heart
 And not the jeweled mistress of a king.”

CROESUS

“ Thou fiery maid! thy glances scathe, it seems
 Ere they destroy men’s perishable hearts.
 To cool this passion, some chill mountain peak
 Should’st thou be chained to, for thou art the child
 Of that sore punished god who brought to earth
 A fire that kindled once, was quenched no more.
 Nay, frown not! I would perish in the flames
 Most willingly ere thou should’st suffer thus.
 But hark! I hear a footfall like the snow
 That chills that icy peak whereof we jest.”

IONE

“ It is the Queen! Ah, here are chains for me!”

CROESUS

“ And here is one will break them, never fear!
 Yet shall I use some subtlety in this
 That we will not defy her, but delude.”

(*The Queen enters, and Croesus advances to greet her with exaggerated courtesy, while Ione folds her hands upon her breast and assumes a proud but respectful attitude.*)

CROESUS

"Fair Queen, I never yet commanded thee
Yet could I so, I would at this one hour
Compel thy presence and thy courtesy
To do thy lord a grace for one he loved."

QUEEN

"Thus openly dost thou confess thy love
For this lost girl who wins thee from my side?"

CROESUS

"Nay, not of her I speak. Her sire was one
Who saved me in the desert, when I lay
Deserted, wounded, and most desperate.
We, joining hands, were brothers till the hour
When in the thick of battle, like a shield
He rode before me; thus received my death,
And dying, gave me her as his bequest.
So then from Ephesus I brought her here."

QUEEN (*contemptuously*)

"And tended her thyself; sure princely rank
Is hers, when the great Croesus plays her slave."

CROESUS (*mildly*)

"Her rank is princely, but 'tis pity spreads
O'er this young head its shielding canopy."

QUEEN (*bitterly*)

"Man's pity! what a travesty is this.
Thy pity! see—I take this damask rose
And breathe upon it roughly; mar its bloom
And throw it where a slave may trample it.
Such is thy pity, and thy tenderness!
Beware it, girl! for in my eastern home
When I was young and sweet, and like this flower
He wooed me, won me like a prince, and brought
Me, a king's daughter, here to share his throne.
He loved me, and he crushed me, like to this!"

(*She plucks another rose and crushes it under her foot
—then continues*)

"Yet am I queen in Lydia, and to me
Thou makest homage, girl; or as the stars
Fade out against the glory of the dawn
Thy little glimmer dies, absorbed and lost;
Forgotten, as a jewel cast aside.
And when my will is done, why then the King
May take his vengeance on me; 'Twill be well
To so complete the ruin; 'T will be well."

IONE (*kneeling at the Queen's feet*)

"Great Queen, have pity! I am innocent
Of any wrong to thee or to the King;
I am but as a child who plays with beams
Cast by the sun upon the shining sand,

When lo! the sea creeps upward and engulfs
The foolish one who hath approached too near."

QUEEN (*sterling*)

"Thou chasest beams to-day, but even now
The shadows steal behind thee, spectre like;
Relentless, as the ruin of thy youth
That goes unto its burial, passion-slain
By him whose pity is thy recompense.
Yet as thou art so young, and I a queen
Whose soul has never stooped to cruelty,
I'll take thee hence to be my bower maid
And if in truth of princely lineage
Thou shalt be placed according to thy birth."

IONE (*kissing the Queen's hand*)

"Madam, I kiss thy hand and pledge thee here
My love, and truest loyalty."

CROESUS (*aside*)

"Poor child! her terror hath frenzied her
And prudence shameth love too readily.
Yet this allegiance may be but a ruse."

(*Aloud to Ione*)

"Go hence, my little one; thou art the Queen's."

(*Aside*)

"But by the gods! thou yet shalt be all mine
Or else I'll send thee to that vale of dreams."

(*Exit Queen with Ione.*)

CROESUS (*softly*)

"Ione! Ione!"

(*She looks back twistfully, but waves her hand once, and passes out.*)

CROESUS

"Thou little coward thing! Well, we go hence
To fight the Persians shortly, and my gear
Shall be the heavier for thy weight, my girl!
The Queen may stay and brood or vengearce here,
I care not; surely I have won the gods
To grant me this indulgence for my gifts."

(*He paces on, musing*)

"When Cyrus falls—why then, but what is this?"

(*A messenger enters hurriedly accompanied by the General of the Lydian army. They both kneel before CROESUS*)

MESSENGER

"Great King, live thou forever! for thy gifts
Have won the gods to love thee, and they speak."

CROESUS

"Art thou from Delphi?"

MESSENGER

"I am from thence, O King!"

CROESUS

"Thy message, instantly."

(*The messenger hands him a sealed parchment*)

CROESUS (*reading*)

“That mighty one who yet shall overthrow
A kingdom, bringing it to utter woe
To Persia turns his eyes, nor stays his hand;
He strikes and spares not; 'tis the gods' command.”
(*smiling, well pleased*)

“Why, this is what we longed for; thou hast grace
As all who bring good tidings unto us.
Go, Simon! rest him, and endow him well;
For Mercury was not more welcome unto Mars
Than he who frees my chafing soul to-day.”

(*Exit Messenger and General*)

CROESUS (*pacing back and forth with eager strides*)

“Now must I take with oracles of war
Stern counsel, and consult my sturdy chiefs;
War-hacked and grim of face, but true to me
As much I fear me these smooth Greeks are false,
Or would be could it serve their purposes.
Yet Ione is Greek, and faithful too,
I'll send for her. This news will please her well.”

(*to a slave*)

“Go thou unto the Queen, and say thy lord
Commands the maiden to return again
And hear a message sent from Ephesus.
'Tis from her kinsmen and concerns her much.”

(*The slave obeys, but looks frightened, and CROESUS laughs*)

“Who fears, makes others fear; it is redress
That fits a woman, in her impotence
To spill the poisoned vials on her slaves
That would anoint my head, had she the power.”

(*He seats himself, and returning to the perusal of the oracle's message, is soon lost in thought. A stir at the entrance causes him to look up, and he sees the mocking obeisance which the soldier on guard makes, as IONE is admitted. CROESUS' eye flashes angrily, but IONE runs to him, and laughs gayly as she kneels beside him.*)

IONE

“What dangerous looks, my lord! Are they for me?”

CROESUS (*sternly*)

“Nay, not so, sweet one; for the insolent.”

IONE

“Then flash thine eyes for some far distant one?”

CROESUS

“Perhaps; but here is news; I'll read it thee.”

(*He reads her the scroll, and IONE claps her hands*)

IONE

“And thou wilt march at once, and take me too?”

CROESUS (*teasingly*)

“Why, thou hast sworn allegiance to the Queen.”

IONE (*beseechingly*)

“My lord, she was so sad, I pitied her.

But thou wilt let me go? Oh, say thou wilt!”

CROESUS (*pretending anger*)

“I'll make a vestal of thee; thou shalt tend
The lamps in Dian's temple; sent by me
As my most precious gift unto her shrine.”

IONE (*archly*)

“Oh, pardon me! thou art so happy now
I know thou canst forgive my treachery.”

CROESUS (*appearing to relent*)

“I think thou'rt right. This time I'll pardon thee,
And take thee with me for thy punishment.”

(*She kisses his hand, and after hesitating a moment looks up at him, as if desiring, and yet fearing to ask another boon.*)

CROESUS

“Thine eyes speak some petition, more than this
Which had been granted ere thou asked for it.”

IONE (*soberly*)

“O King, thou readest me, my thoughts are thine.”

CROESUS (*tenderly*)

“Thou sayest truly, for our souls are one;
And I would bid thee do this thing unheard
But that thy play of suppliance is sweet
And sweet the granting while I hold the power.”

IONE

“And sweet it is to kneel for one like me;
I'd rather be a woman than a queen.”

CROESUS

“Would'st thou, sweetheart? Ah, 'tis thy subtlety
Knowing the love of men for gentleness.”

IONE (*laughing merrily*)

“I think of gods, not men; a votaress
To Dian's temple, dedicate by thee.”

CROESUS

“Ah, 'tis a clever ruse, to still the Queen.
But speak thy wish, and thou shalt have it straight.”

IONE

“My lord, I left at Ephesus for thee
An only brother, ill and desolate.
I crave a messenger to send him news,
And bring me word again that he is well.”

CROESUS (*frowning*)

“I like it not that thou should'st think of aught
That lies behind thee; 'tis not meet.
Thou art the love of Croesus; surely so
Old loves may be forgotten happily.
What then? What then? a tear? Nay, Ione
It shall be as thou wilt; where is thy scroll?”

IONE

“My lord, forgive me if I show it not;
It is too childish and ill writ for thee.
I'd die of shame to see thee look on it.”

CROESUS

“Well, well! I think that I may trust thee, sweet,
That 'tis no lover thou art pining for.”

IONE (*throwing herself at his feet*)

“Thou knowest truly that I live in thee.”

CROESUS

“Ay, so thou dost, my little one; but here
A close-writ parchment claims me; wilt thou stay,
Or shall I bid thee leave me presently?”

IONE

“Oh, let me stay and help decipher it.

I am not learned, yet I crave to learn.”

(*She leans upon his shoulder, and looks curiously at the parchment*)

IONE

“It looks most strangely with its curving lines
Like rivers intersecting; as for these
They might be roads that lead to Persia.”

CROESUS (*laughing heartily*)

“Why, thou hast guessed it with such readiness
I'll even take thee for a counsellor;
Disclose my plans and try thy woman's wit.
It may be, in some vivid flash, the way
Shall show more clearly than we've traced it here.”

IONE (*archly*)

“I grow so very proud in this new rôle
That much I fear I'll lose that gentleness
That gods and men approve; so thou hast said.”

(*A sound of arms is heard outside*)

GUARD

“O King! The generals wait to speak with thee.”

CROESUS (*hurriedly*)

“Go then, my Ione! prepare thy scroll
It shall be safely sent to Ephesus.”

(*IONE kneels and kisses his hand, and then passes out swiftly.*)

GUARD (*aside*)

“She is a subtle Greek, I like her not.
And yet how Croesus' eyes did flash at me!”

CURTAIN.

ACT II.

SCENE II.

(*An antechamber in the apartments of the Queen. Ione reclines on a divan, slave maidens grouped near her. Time—near midnight.*)

IONE (*musing*)

“Ione, poor Ione! surely thou
Wert Aphrodite's sport in coming here
To love, and shame, and soft imprisonment.
And thou, a noble maiden of the Greeks,
Art held in bondage like some slave of war.
Great Croesus, how I love thee! even for thee

I have renounced my noble heritage.
Ah, here's the Queen——!”

(*She rises from the divan, and prostrates herself*)

QUEEN

“Rise, maiden! as an elder sister, I
Do pity thee in thy abandonment
Unto a passion that shall prove thy doom.”

IONE (*aside*)

“Thou'rt much more elder than thou'rt sisterly.”
(*To the Queen, meekly*)

“Most grateful am I for thy leniency
O Queen; but let me kneel in penitence
Having offended, tho' unwillingly.”

QUEEN

“Maiden, thou speakest fair; and yet 'tis well
To know thee better ere I trust to this.
Thou'rt native born to Ephesus, art not?
Full well I know the Greeks, and thou art like
A young Ephesian noble sent us here
With gifts from that fair city to the King.
Thou hast his eyes—his hair—and yes—his voice.”

(*The Queen speaks dreamily, and Ione detects the meaning in her tone.*)

IONE (*aside*)

“So thus it was, my brother; thou did'st leave
Thy heart in Lydia, and reached'st high
to place thy love upon a throne, as this
Thy foolish sister has not feared to do.”

(*To the Queen*)

“Madam, thou'rt placed so loftily, thy glance
Is like to Juno's from Olympus cast
Upon a world of men that worships her.
My brother coming hence, distraught as one
Who rises from a fever ere 'tis past
Filled our fond hearts with grief; his cruel state
Was even as when Aphrodite marks
A mortal for her sport and leaves him mad,
With hopeless love and frenzy impotent.”

QUEEN (*dreamily*)

“And was it even so? 'tis very sad!”

IONE

“Ay, sad it was; and when the end drew near——”

QUEEN (*wildly*)

“He is not dead? not dead?”

(*Ione marks her shrewdly, and pauses for a moment*)

IONE

“Well no, not dead; but will be so of grief;
For when the young men march from Ephesus
To join the swelling hosts of Lydia's king
And fight the Persians—my Ismenides
Will lie upon a couch and eat his heart
For very sadness, that he may not come
Within such nearness to his goddess' throne.”

QUEEN (*musing*)

“He’ll stay in Ephesus, while I stay here?”

IONE (*aside*)

“Ay, will he, till thou sendest for him straight.”

(*Aloud*)

“There’s naught to do but stay; he dies of love
And will not see the armies back again.”

QUEEN

“’Tis sad! oh, very sad! I’m grieved for thee.”

IONE

“’Twas knowing this, my dying father gave
Me to the King; for poor Ismenides
Is crowned with fatal blooms from Hades brought
And may not linger long beneath the sun.”

QUEEN (*grown white with emotion*)

“Girl! my too sympathetic heart doth throb
With pain at tales like these; I will retire
And leave thee to thy slumbers; sleep in peace!”

(*She makes a sign to her attendants to follow her, and glides away*)

IONE (*bitterly*)

“So thy dread jealousy is not for love.
’Tis but thy vanity, and knowing this
I’ll give the King his will more willingly.
I have had younger lovers, but to me
He is so like the gods he hath no age.
Love leaps a wider chasm than yawns between
His years and mine; we’ll bridge it merrily.”

(*She throws herself again upon the divan and beckons to a slave.*)

“Give me a lute, for song is solace sweet;
Why! those are words that almost make a song.”

(*She takes a lute from the slave, and sings.*)

“Give me a lute, for song is solace sweet
And bringeth rest again;
Give me a lute! our trembling fingers meet—
Ah! now is solace vain;
The little lute lies broken at thy feet
And shivers in its pain.”

(*IONE throws the instrument down with a laugh*)

“I am no Sappho, and my halting rhymes
Need better music than a broken lute
Can lend them. So, this ancient Queen
(My elder sister truly) has her flaw.
My guile will reach it, for Ismenides
Were surely doting could he think her fair,
Except as grand-dames seem to little boys.
Yet dizzy heights win glory from the sun
And lifted eyes grow weaker strained so far.
Alas! I am so weary, that to sleep
Is all I long for, and I—”

(*She sleeps, leaving the words unfinished. The QUEEN re-enters, and gazes upon her mournfully.*)

QUEEN

“Younger by twenty years than he, and yet
 So like! so like! just where the hair falls down
 Upon the white low brow; the wide, deep eyes
 Set far apart are his, and his the mouth
 That more pertains to Egypt than to Greece,
 So rich and lovely are its ruby curves.
 Ismenides will grieve for her I think;
 Ah me! to see him once, to hear his voice;
 When Croesus goes I'll send; 't will not be wrong
 For is not here his sister waiting him?
 His sister, torn I verily believe, by force
 From home and kinsmen by this cruel king.”

(*A curtain is parted behind her, and the KING enters.*)

QUEEN (*starting violently*)

“My lord!”

KING

“Ay; even so.”

(*He looks toward the divan where IONE is sleeping*)

QUEEN

“The honor is too great; I am not used
 To this unmarked, informal courtesy.”

CROESUS (*craftily*)

“My gracious Queen, I come to offer thanks
 For thy most sweet compliance with my will
 Concerning this young Ione, and speak
 Of purposes regarding her that thou
 Most readily will sanction. Ere we move
 On Persia, I shall send by trusty hands
 The maid to Dian's temple, there to tend
 The sacred lamps in vestal purity.”

QUEEN (*indignantly*)

“Would'st thou insult the gods? not all thy gifts
 Could purge thee from so great impiety.”

CROESUS

“Nay, thou'rt severe! the maiden has no fault,
 Unless 'tis sin to be so innocent.”

QUEEN

“My lord! the Greeks have taught thee subtlety,
 And sitting at thy feet, why, even I
 Must learn a little also; yet in this
 I fail to see thy meaning; knowing thou
 Must ever have a purpose under it;
 A passion, or a whim, to gratify.
 Whate'er it is, thou gav'st the girl to me
 And here she stays to charm my loneliness.”

CROESUS (*sternly*)

“'Tis only in my absence that thy rule
 Is known in Lydia. But she awakes!
 How now, sweet Ione? art frightened then?
 Come tell me, is my will enough for thee?”

(*IONE sinks to her knees and gazes from him to the QUEEN; then reads the meaning in CROESUS' eyes, and answers*)

IONE

"I am a Greek, and yet in bonds to thee
To do thy bidding, and I wait thy will."

CROESUS

"Wilt go to Ephesus as vestal, then?"

IONE

"Why, even that, if thou wilt have it so."

CROESUS

"I have so willed it; when I march from hence
Thou'l join the company, and where the road
Diverges, thou to Ephesus shall go
Guarded by such brave escort bearing gifts
That the high priestesses shall welcome thee
Most royally, as coming from the King."

QUEEN (*aside*)

"He is so false, I trust no word of this,
But I have learned to fear, and hold my peace.
And yet—Ah! 'tis thy face, Ismenides,
Copied in her, that makes me as a slave
Who dares not say, 'I will not,' or 'I will.'"

(*Aloud*)

"O King! since protest may not soften thee,
And this young maiden must resign her youth
To sacred service in some distant shrine,
I'll speed her going. But 'tis midnight now
When Earth herself is breathing drowsily
And sighing her to sleep for weariness.
Young maidens are as flowers, that need the dark
And coolness; we will leave thee then;
In my wide-windowed chamber lay us down
Like sisters in the starlight. Come, my child!
Thou'rt dreaming even now; 'tis late! 'tis late!"

(*Exit the QUEEN with IONE.*)

(*The KING retires from the other side of the stage. He has hardly done so, when an aged Ethiopian enters softly and approaching the entrance to the QUEEN's sleeping chamber, strikes a few weird chords on an instrument which he carries under his robe. As if at a well-known signal, the QUEEN presently returns and beckons him to follow her as she glides across the apartment and seats herself near a large screen which conceals her from anyone suddenly entering.*)

QUEEN (*anxiously*)

"Rise, faithful one! only in times of fear
When I have needed caution hast thou come
At midnight thus; and well I know, thy care
Has been to Croesus, cruel as he is,
A thing to reckon with; else long ago
A white flash striking, or a draught too sweet,
Had made swift room for some new sad-browed queen."

SLAVE

"Lady, I bring thee that will comfort thee.
Like some poor way-worn beggar, hunger-faint,
One lay without the gates; great Croesus passed

And bade us bring him in; I, watching him,
 The while the others slept, (for many hours
 Did pass in stupor ere he woke again)
 Knew him for that young prince who in the train
 Of lords from Ephesus, came hither once
 And lingered many days; he knew me too,
 As thy poor faithful slave, and taking this
 He bade me bring it to the Queen, and say
 That openly he dares not speak with her
 Yet craves to kneel once more and kiss her feet."

(He presents a jewel to the Queen; she takes it eagerly, and examines it with evident joy.)

QUEEN *(tenderly)*

"Ismenides! and hast thou risked thy death,
 Lain sick beside the road, that thou to me
 Might come thus empty, to be filled again?
 Thou dearest beggar that e'er craved sweet alms."
(to the slave)

"Go, bring him here, for all are wrapped in sleep
 And those great gods who sent him at this hour
 Watch near us now to guide the hand of fate.
 I will not fear; it is their hour, not mine."

(The slave retires quickly to do her bidding, and the Queen, unable to control her emotion, paces the apartment with soft, rapid steps; showing by her passionate gestures an overwhelming surprise and joy. After a few moments she reseats herself, and with a strong effort, assumes her usual majestic demeanor. When ISMENIDES is admitted with great caution by the slave (who then stands on guard during the interview), the Queen receives him with studied coldness, while he kneels at her feet, and passionately kisses her hands.)

ISMENIDES

"Lady, though many years have wearied me,
 I count two visions as the whole of life;
 One, when my eyes first raised themselves to thee
 And fell in blindness, dazzled utterly.
 Since then I walked in shadow; until now,
 Oh, happiness! thy glory shines again,
 And seeing it my very soul grows faint
 With joy's sweet second coming, and the sight
 Restored by her who left me in the dark."

QUEEN

"Alas, thou flatterer! I trust thee not."

ISMENIDES

"We trust not that we own, for presently
 The flaws we make ourselves are all too plain."

QUEEN

"Indeed thou art not mine, for thou hast lain
 In other bonds than these, at Ephesus."

ISMENIDES

"Ay, in the holding of Proserpine
 Whose fruit is sweet unto love's loneliness."

QUEEN (*more softly*)

“Then Ione spoke soothly, thou wert ill.”

ISMENIDES (*starting up*)

“’Tis true then, she is here, my Ione?”

QUEEN

“Why yes, she hath a princely lover here,
And marches hence to-morrow in his train.
A warlike maid, who loves not bowers like these.”

ISMENIDES (*violently*)

“I will pursue them, and sore punish him
Who hath defrauded me, and shamed her.”

QUEEN (*scornfully*)

“Truly, thou’rt bold, to threaten Croesus so.”

ISMENIDES (*turning pale*)

“The King? The King?”

QUEEN

“Ay, ay, the King! is it such news to thee
That Croesus takes his pleasures royally?”

ISMENIDES (*grinding his teeth*)

“The gods send ruin on his impious head.”

QUEEN (*whispering*)

“Ismenides, wilt thou be fate for him?
I, too, am shamed, and Croesus’ treachery
Shall breed within the place he nourished it
Till serpent-like it creeps to Persia’s King.
The gods have chosen thee, I think, for this.”

ISMENIDES (*broodingly*)

“I am a free Ephesian, owing not
Allegiance to this tyrant ravisher.”

QUEEN

“Why truly, so thou art! and as for me
Great Cyrus is my friend; then go to him
And warn him quickly; take to him a scroll
That I shall give thee; say I copied it
Most secretly from Croesus’ plan of war.
’T will be enough, and we shall be avenged.”

ISMENIDES (*eagerly*)

“I do but kiss thy hand, and then I’ll go.”

QUEEN (*changing her manner to one of great tenderness*)

“Nay, not so hurriedly; thou’rt travel sore
And I am weary of my loneliness.
Besides we must confer; these weighty deeds
Whose infancy is brief, need time to grow
Unto that stature which shall fright a king.
To play at fate and fix her balances
So Croesus shall go down, and Cyrus up,
Takes wisdom wrought on courage cunningly
As pearls are broidered on a warrior’s shield.”

ISMENIDES

“Then lady, keep my courage in thy hands
And give it back when thou hast jeweled it;
For by the gods! this is the Lotos-land
And all my strength is swathed in golden dreams
That are like cerements about my limbs.”

I felt this numbness once when Hades loomed
 Within the shadow that my body cast,
 But now, in Paradise I fear it not
 Because my soul is happy, seeing thee.
 Yet when thou'rt ready lift the spell once more
 And send me forth to serve thee valiantly."

QUEEN (*gayly*)

"I'll send thee; oh, I'll send thee; never fear!
 For love is sweet, but so is vengeance too;
 My hand upon thy brow shall soothe thy care
 And lip on lip shall heal the longing pain
 That I have known, and think that thou hast felt
 A very little, though I trust thee not;
 And when we have been happy for a day,
 (A day we must postpone till Croesus goes)
 Why then with ling'ring hands I'll push thee forth
 And stiffen courage up with jealousy
 Lest love should prove too dear and keep thee here.
 But now thou art a beggar, sick and sore
 And must lie sleeping till I send for thee;
 Go—take him—Nilos; To thy watchful care
 I give him; guard his life as mine."

(*She allows ISMENIDES to kiss her hand once more and then dismisses him hurriedly and silently. After the slave has led him away she stands in a listening attitude for awhile, and then passes into her sleeping chamber.*)

ACT III.

(*In camp near Sardis—time afternoon. CROESUS' tent occupies the foreground and a little apart from it is pitched a gayly draped pavilion, at the entrance of which IONE is seated, playing on her lute. The curtains of the royal tent are closed, and two soldiers stand on guard, one of them a warrior of venerable appearance.*)

OLD WARRIOR

"'Twere well the gods destroyed me ere I came to this."

SECOND SOLDIER

"How now, my ancient one?"

OLD WARRIOR

"They slay the war-horse when his day is done;
 I would that Croesus' sire had thus to me
 Repaid a faithful servant's loyalty."

SECOND SOLDIER

"Hast scent of battle in thy nostrils then?"

OLD WARRIOR

"Rather the scent of shame for him I love;
 How often when great Croesus was a child
 I lifted him, wild clamoring, to my steed,
 And bore him proudly on from rank to rank
 That every soldier looking on his face
 Might love the kingly babe and strike for him;
 A nursling of the battlefield he grew
 And waxed on warfare as if blood were milk."

SECOND SOLDIER

“And well he loves its flavor, even now.”

OLD WARRIOR

“Ay, but still better when it floods the cheek
Of the young maid who rests in yonder tent.”

SECOND SOLDIER

“I blame him not; Ha, ha! if I were king!”

OLD WARRIOR (*muttering*)

“She is a false Ephesian; who can tell
What treason may befall our arms from this.”

SECOND SOLDIER

“Hush! hush! here comes the captain of the host.”

(*An officer whose accoutrements and bearing proclaim
his rank, approaches from the forest and the guards
salute him.*)

OFFICER

“Old Theron, tell my master I would speak with him.”

OLD WARRIOR

“My lord, he sleeps.”

OFFICER

“’Tis well! I’m very glad of it.

Sleep is the ebbing of the day’s rough stream
That carries out our souls to soundless seas
Whereon we drift to all that’s sweet and strange
Then turn and say ‘Alas, we did but dream.’
So let the King have sleep to solace him
And dreams to give him respite from his grief.”

(*He seats himself nearby, but at that moment the KING
draws aside the curtains and appears at the door of
the tent. The officer starts forward, and as CROESUS
greets him kindly, kneels and kisses his hand with
great reverence.*)

CROESUS

“Welcome, my Captain! I have looked for thee.
But why this sad demeanor? ’tis not well
To grieve too greatly over one defeat;
I am a soldier, and I blame thee not.”

CAPTAIN

“I dread thy anger, but still more thy grief
My lord and King; for I have that to tell
Will greatly anger and sore grieve thee too.
This one mischance is nothing; but the cause
The cruel treachery of one so dear——”

CROESUS (*angrily*)

“Treachery! and one so dear? thou ravest
Or dost presume misfortune’s heel to use
And trample where allegiance yet is due.”

CAPTAIN (*weeping*)

“Croesus, for many years my life has been
A thing thou heldest lightly in thy hand
And cast as freely ’gainst the enemy
As thou would’st throw a spear or javelin;

And I have loved to be thus sternly thrown,
Glorying in thy power and majesty.
Thy wounds are mine, and who betrayest thee
Has set my heart a-bleeding unto death."

(CROESUS' face softens, and he lays his hand kindly on
the chief's shoulder.)

CROESUS

"I do believe it, and I love thee well;
Then tell thy tale, I'll listen patiently."

CAPTAIN

"My lord! my lord! I wish some other tongue
That found it not so bitter, brought it thee."

CROESUS

"Delay no more; thy words but torture thus."

CAPTAIN

"O King! our spies returned from Persia's camp
Have brought us word of one Ismenides
Who, left behind in Ephesus, was ill;
But at a word from Lady Ione——"

CROESUS (*fiercely*)

"Thou liest, dog!"

CAPTAIN (*sadly*)

"My lord, I am too bold; I'll leave thee then."

CROESUS

"Nay, nay! speak on; I'll hear this perfidy."

CAPTAIN

"A messenger from camp bore him a scroll
Which he, receiving, took to Cyrus straight."

CROESUS

"Avenging gods! what throat shall feel my spring?
The spy who foully made and fashioned this,
Or he who brings it with so false a face?
Listen, thou wretch! I spare thy crawling life
But as I spare a reptile in my road.
Knowing the hatred borne to Ephesus
By some among ye, I can wonder yet
That ye would dare to brave me, even now
When I am fallen, and my head is low."

(*The chief does not answer, but turns and would retire,
profound grief expressed in his face.*)

CROESUS

"Stay yet a moment! what contained this scroll?"

CAPTAIN

"My lord, thy line of march and plan of war."

CROESUS

"Ah, this is madness! did Ismenides
Read maps of war upon a sister's scroll
That held but loving words to comfort him?"

CAPTAIN (*humbly*)

"I know not, lord; but 'tis the jest in camp
Where Persia glories in our sore defeat,

That once again a woman has betrayed
The hand that cherished her——”

CROESUS (*sternly*)

“ Silence, thou slave! yet bring the spy to me.”

CAPTAIN

“ I have him near at hand, I'll bring him in.”

(*He gives a signal at which the spy approaches, and the Captain retires leaving him with Croesus, who orders the curtains of the tent to be drawn during the interview. In a few moments the spy reappears, looking pale and frightened, and makes his exit hurriedly. Ione, who has been sitting before her tent in the background, playing on her lute, now comes nearer the front of the stage, and placing herself on a bank under a large tree, at some distance away from the royal pavilion, she begins to sing.*)

SONG.

“ The white rose of the King,” so Persia called her;
She shrank, and whiter grew;
Poor rose! the greatness of her love appalled her,
Its short-lived joy she knew.

The King stooped down and said, “ O rose! thy whiteness
Hath been untinged till now;
Blush thou to red, sweet rose, and wreath with brightness
Thy loving monarch's brow.”

Shivered the pale one then—“ O King! adoring
At thy dear feet I lie;
But breathe not on me lest thy love's outpouring
Shall mean thy rose must die.”

Too late! love's sunshine warms, uplifts, enthralls me;
I climb unto thy breast;
Blush at thy kiss, careless of what befalls me,
And dying, die most blest.”

(*Croesus emerges from his tent, approaches unheard, and listens to the song, his face growing rigid. As she finishes he addresses her abruptly. Ione springs up gayly.*)

IONE

“ Welcome, my lord! but how you stole on me!”

CROESUS (*sternly*)

“ Thy song displeases me. I like it not.”

IONE (*bewildered*)

“ I thought myself alone, and knew not that
It wearied thee. So then, I'll sing no more.”

CROESUS (*coldly*)

“ I think thou'rt right, and thou shalt sing no more.”

IONE (*turning pale*)

“ The Persians! have they come to slay us then?”

CROESUS

"Why no, not thee; for thou art Persia's friend."

IONE

"A cruel jest, my lord, and hath no point."

CROESUS

"Thou pointed it thyself a moment since.

Heard I not, 'Persia's King—and love—and death?'

Ay, thou shalt know all three and perfect it.

'Twere pity that thy jest should fail in this."

IONE

"Thou art so strange; 'tis grief that maddens thee."

CROESUS

"Why yes, 'tis grief, and jesting such as thine.

I ever loved true wit, but this is false."

IONE (*tenderly*)

"Beloved King, if I have erred in aught

Or rasped where I would comfort, pardon me.

I am the one sole maid 'mong armed men,

While thou art plunged in care and do forget

The little comrade who left all for thee.

I did but sing for pastime here alone."

CROESUS (*holding out his arms*)

"Come here then; sing once more! I like the words.

They were of love, and death, and perfidy."

IONE (*sadly, but running to him*)

"Of love, and death, but not of perfidy.

Oh, thou art very strange!"

CROESUS

"The last words were the sweetest; sing, I say!"

IONE (*bravely*)

"Thou holdest me too closely, yet I'll sing."

(Sings)

"Too late! love's sunshine warms, uplifts, entralls me,

I climb unto thy breast;

Blush at thy kiss, careless of what befalls me,

And dying, die most blest.—Ah, ah!"

CROESUS (*pressing her against his mailed bosom*)

"Then die! and think thou'rt happy in thy death."

IONE (*terrified*)

"My lord, I fear! I fear! and thou dost hurt me."

CROESUS

"These arms that hold thee are not Persia's, yet

They can make very close a last embrace."

IONE (*struggling to free herself*)

"Croesus, if thou dost love me, loose thine hold!"

CROESUS

"Come nearer; I would have thee on the heart

That thou betrayest to captivity."

IONE

"Thou ravest! Ione was never false,

Nor Croesus cruel. Ah, thy breast is hard!"

(She gasps, and her face grows rigid with pain.)

CROESUS

"An iron heart, that thou did'st heat and heat
And give to Persia's flail when it was red.
'Tis very hard? why yes, 'tis beaten so."

(He exerts great strength, and crushes her in his tightened arms. She raises her eyes in one last anguished look, and then her head falls back.)

CROESUS

"A crystal goblet broken at a touch
Were not more frail than she."

(He gazes upon her unmoved for a moment, and then his calm breaks and he weeps convulsively, and rains kisses on the dead face.)

ACT IV

(A public square in Sardis. A pyre stands ready to be lighted; on it are stacked the arms of the defeated Lydians. A detachment of Persian troops surround the square. Near the pyre stands KING CYRUS with his chief officers. Before him is CROESUS, bound as if for sacrifice.)

CYRUS

"Unbind him! Chains are not for such as he.
Most noble Croesus, knowing not thy worth
I had condemned thee on this pyre to die;
But thou art wisdom's self; no words like these
That thou hast spoken ere were heard by me.
I'll keep thee near me as an honored friend
Who counsels in each sore emergency."

CROESUS

"Great Cyrus! since my consciousness awoke
And put the question, ' whence came I to this? '
I have not said to any ' 'tis thy will! '
Yet had I drawn from lower sources life
Which could flow tributary to the stream
That from Olympus started thy great course,
It would be gladness in that shining flood
To merge my turbid being—seeing thee
Most near akin in god-like majesty.
But such conjunction now, would devastate;
I still have power, and it would surge and beat
And rise in tidal ruin to us both.
Two things in all my life have gladdened me;
One, the mad joy of war; the trumpet blast—
The hot and panting breath that bursts the heart.
The other—ah! and here is bitter woe!
I played with love for years; I was the King,
Who thought that flowers were meant for handling
And then to throw aside and care no more.
But one came—one—Ah! Ah! it is too much;
I cannot word it. In my age she came
And was as if the gods had gathered up

All sweetesses of earth to pleasure me;
 In one last cup to crown and curse the feast.
 She loved me when I stole her from the Greeks
 And would have followed me to Hades then,
 But in her blood a strange rebellious strain
 Fought ever for that freedom held so long
 By the Ephesians till my hand o'ercame
 And harnessed them unwilling to my state.
 I, in my doting, thought to please her, when
 I conned my maps of war; and let her look
 Upon the scroll, and mocking, counsel me.
 Ah, fool! and yet my heart is like to burst
 To think I killed her for her treachery.
 She was a sister to Ismenides.
 Who brought thee tidings——”

(ISMENIDES, who is in attendance on CYRUS, rushes forward.)

ISMENIDES

“O King! what hast thou done to Ione?
 She is most innocent of wrong to thee,
 Though falser than a slave to Ephesus.
 What hast thou done? tell me, thou torturer!”

CYRUS

“Peace, Captain! Peace! thou speakest to a king,
 Who fallen, yet has homage as his due.”

ISMENIDES

“I was born free in Ephesus, my lord;
 And here a tyrant meets his punishment.”

CYRUS

“Peace then! I do command thee as thy chief.”

ISMENIDES (wildly)

“But Ione! my little Ione!
 My little sister lost and shamed by him!
 Must I be silent to her murderer?”

CYRUS

“Croesus, I beg thee of thy courtesy
 To calm this one who would inquire of thee.”

CROESUS (half dazed, and moving near the pyre)

“Yes, yes! I'll calm him; he'll be calmer soon.”

ISMENIDES

“Oh, tell me! is she dead?”

CROESUS (slowly)

“Why yes; I killed her for her treachery.”

ISMENIDES

“Tyrant! She was most faithful unto thee
 And only false unto her state and kin.”

CROESUS (sternly)

“She was not false? who on my very breast
 By subtle sympathy and wise, sweet ways
 Beguiled my wisdom from me; called herself
 My little counsellor, and urged me to the war.
 Then while my love-besotted brain still slept

Sent messengers to thee with maps and charts
 That thou as an Ephesian, loving not
 The hand that bound thee in a golden chain,
 Wert very swift to bring to Cyrus here;
 And he, good soldier, did as all must do,
 Taking from foulest hands the gift of fate."

CYRUS

" Croesus, thou art unjust, to this one here,
 And to the little maid he asks of thee."

CROESUS

" Unjust! he brought you not a scroll?"

CYRUS

" He brought a scroll, indeed. 'Twas from your Queen
 Copied in Sardis ere you marched from thence."

CROESUS (*staggering*)

" The Queen? Ah—so—it was the Queen! she said
 She would have vengeance on us; 'twas the Queen!"

*(He snatches a lighted torch from an attendant, and
 springs toward the pyre. CYRUS rushes forward
 to stop him.)*

CROESUS (*struggling*)

" I need the fire to cleanse me; let me go!
 Death's in my arms; she lies upon my breast
 And clasps me coldly—not like Ione.
 I'm sick with horror of her noisome breath
 Her purple, swollen lips, and starting eyes.
 We'll burn then, since she will not loose her hold."

CYRUS (*overborne by CROESUS' mad strength*)

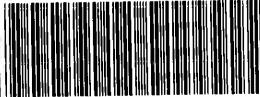
" Come bind him, guards! mad lions must be chained."

*(The guards obey, but before they can reach him CROESUS
 has mounted the pyre and flung his torch upon the
 inflammable material. The flames rise about him
 instantly. CYRUS stands and gazes as if petrified.
 The soldiers press about the pyre with wild cries.)*

CURTAIN.



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 015 930 917 4

6